Research Funding:
Frequently Asked Questions

1. I do entirely doctrinal work as a “lone scholar” and have all the materials I need to do my work accessible to me on site from the university’s resource—what relevance does external research funding have for me?

Whilst research grants can facilitate collaboration with colleagues on larger projects, most humanities and social science sponsors also fund projects that follow the “lone scholar” model. A research grant will usually provide funds for research assistance and research trips to libraries, archives or other relevant research facilities, including travel costs, accommodation expenses, bench fees, and subsistence expenses. Many sponsors will also fund conference attendance, equipment (laptop, digital camera), and other expenses (photocopying, digitisation). Awards generally far exceed the amount that can be sought from the Yorke Fund, which should be reserved for expenses for which external sponsorship is either not available or not forthcoming.

Fellowships can provide periods of leave from teaching and administrative duties, allowing scholars to focus upon their research project.

Grants awarded on the basis of peer review (like those made by research councils and the major charitable sponsors) are prestigious, which is why grant income will be considered as a component of the Research Excellence Framework. Many sponsors include an ‘overhead’ element which is shared between the chest and Faculty. This represents an important stream of funding for the University, a collective effort without which the ‘unfunded’ lone scholar would be just that.

2. As a lone scholar doctrinal researcher, for what sort of projects and associated costs can I obtain/recover through funding from a research grant?

Research funding usually takes the form of grants or fellowships. Research grants for “lone scholar” projects can bring a level of funding which can help to improve papers, articles, and books by providing money for research assistance, conference attendance, publication expenses, and research travel. Fellowships fund periods of research leave, as well as some of research costs provided by grants.

Grants and Fellowships can fund PhDs, research assistance, administrative assistance, global networking, conferences, research trips to libraries, archives or other relevant research facilities (including travel costs, accommodation expenses, bench fees, and subsistence expenses.) Many sponsors will also fund conference attendance, equipment (laptop, digital camera), and other expenses (photocopying, digitisation). They can even pay for digital images to be sent from overseas archival collections.

3. How do I calculate the likely costs of my research?

It is relatively straightforward to provide costings for some items (e.g. equipment). There are standard rates for informal research assistance (e.g. where an LLM student collects materials for your project) and
for post-doctoral research fellowships (on larger projects). There is always a strong element of guesswork involved in determining how much you will need, but it is important to have some sort of rationale for the funding you are seeking. The Faculty’s Research Grants Administrator will be able to advise you.

4. Can I get funding in relation to a conference or seminar that I am running?

Yes. There are schemes for funding public conferences, closed conferences, workshops and seminars that can provide funds to cover administrative costs, meals, publicity, travel, and accommodation. Who you should apply to will vary on the area in which you work, the nature of the meeting you wish to fund, and the level of funding needed. Hosting a conference can help to generate academic ideas, build networks, bring people together from different disciplines, different spheres (e.g. government, the judiciary, administrators, and the legal profession) or different countries, disseminate output and enhance prestige. If you are considering applying for this type of funding, the Faculty’s Research Grants Administrator will be able to advise you about where best to apply.

5. I want to do empirical research. What sort of funding opportunities are there for this sort of research, and—if I’m new to this area—with whom can I talk about acquiring/developing my experience in this type of work?

If you are working, or would like to work, in empirical research, do join the mailing list empirical@law.cam.ac.uk by registering via computer.office@law.cam.ac.uk. The list is used to circulate information regarding training and specific funding opportunities relating to empirical research, and to provide a discussion forum for methodological and ethical queries on which members of the list would like feedback from colleagues.

The Joint Schools’ Social Science Research Methods training courses cover a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and issues such as ethics etc. Principally intended for MPhil and PhD students, faculty members are also entitled to book a place of these courses, on the understanding that priority will be given to students in case the course becomes over-full. For full details of courses on offer and to book, please see: http://www.training.cam.ac.uk/jsss/.

The Institute of Criminology also runs a Criminological Research Methods MPhil course, which members of the Law Faculty would be welcome to attend if there are spaces (much depends on the size of the MPhil class and on whether any PhD students from Criminology or Law come). The course runs on Tuesday mornings from 9-12.30 am in the Michaelmas Term and for the first four weeks in the Lent Term, with additional workshops in the Easter Term. There will be a qualitative methods course during the Lent term and Easter term also. Those wishing to attend should contact Loraine Gelsthorpe on lrg10@cam.ac.uk.

The University Computing Service also runs a number of relevant training courses, for example in use of the leading data analysis software packages (such as SPSS): see http://www.training.cam.ac.uk/ucs/.

For information on research ethics in Humanities & Social Sciences, see: http://www.cshss.cam.ac.uk/committees/ethics/

At least once a year, the Institute of Criminology offers workshops on N.Vivo or Atlas Ti (computer assisted analysis of qualitative data) for MPhil and PhD students, post-doctoral researchers and anyone else who is interested. Details will be circulated to all Faculty members by email in due course.
Courses are also available from other providers, for example the University of Surrey. Details of their courses may be obtained from: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sociology/research/researchcentres/caqdas/index.htm

Empirical research can often be time-consuming and labour intensive, necessitating research assistance and transcription services—expenses which can be covered by research grants.

6. What scope is there to apply for funding work with international collaborators and/or collaborators at other universities in the UK?

Research Grants offer a range of opportunities for collaboration both within Cambridge and with colleagues at other institutions, both domestic and international. The major sponsors tend to try and offer different opportunities from one another, so there is usually a ‘best fit’ scheme. The Research Grants Administrator will be able to advise you which scheme best suits your project.

7. Applying for research funding looks like a time-consuming exercise that ironically is just going to eat into my precious research time! What can I do to make it less painful?

A good application takes time to prepare and success is not guaranteed. However, proposal writing can help to hone research aims, especially with input from Faculty peer-reviewers. Examples of successful applications can be requested from the Research Grants Administrator. The Research Grant Administrator will complete the more annoying parts of the application—i.e. the pFACT and financial forms—on your behalf.

8. What is the Faculty Peer-Review Process?

To improve the likelihood of success, all applications are reviewed by the Head of Department and another Faculty member. The process is informal and applicants are welcome to suggest their own reviewers. Applications should be completed three weeks in advance of the deadline to allow sufficient time for Faculty Peer Review and Research Office approval. An electronic copy of the full draft should be submitted to:

   The Chairman of the Faculty Board (chair@law.cam.ac.uk)
   The Secretary of the Faculty Board, Ms Laura Smethurst (lcs38@cam.ac.uk)
   The Research Grants Administrator, Ms Rosie Šnajdr (rs364@cam.ac.uk)

The application will then be forwarded to a specialist and non-specialist reviewer for comments. Responsibility for ensuring that Postdoctoral and Visiting Fellowships follow the proper procedure falls respectively on mentors and nominators/hosts. Applications to internal sponsors (e.g. Newton Trust) need only be reviewed by the Chair of the Faculty Board. These applications should be sent to the Chair (copied to the Research Grants Administrator) at least one week prior to the deadline.

9. Research funding deadline application deadlines often seem to be very short and I don’t have time to put together a proposal in term-time to meet the required timetable. What can I be doing to put myself in a better position to take advantage of these funding rounds when they suddenly pop up on the radar?

The most pertinent opportunities are forwarded to the academic email list by the Research Grants Administrator. However, it is still best to get in touch with the Research Grants Administrator at the earliest
possible stage. The Administrator will be able to do funding searches for you and give you as much notice as possible about deadlines.

10. Can I use research grants to buy out my teaching time?

Yes—but only by applying for Fellowships. Unless Research Grants can cover the cost of a replacement post, the research grant is considered an activity undertaken in your dedicated research time.

11. What sort of funding bodies are there that I could be applying to for the sort of work that I do?

There are a lot of options, but most external funding comes from the AHRC and ESRC Research Councils or from the major charitable sponsors (The British Academy, The Leverhulme Trust, and The Nuffield Foundation). Applications to European sponsors, like the ERC, have also been on the rise within the School in the last few years. Your Research Grants Administrator should be able to help you find the best sponsor for your research proposal.

12. What happens if I am successful?

Depending on the precise nature of the grant, usually the grant is paid to the university and a research account is created. If you need to appoint research fellows, there will be certain processes that must be complied with. In relation to other expenses, you will need to keep receipts and reclaim from the fund. Your Research Grants Administrator helps deal with all the monitoring and reporting requirements.

Under the Faculty Incentives for Research Grants Scheme, Principal Investigators are entitled to a 25% share of any departmental overheads generated by their grant, provided that the total departmental share of overheads exceeds £1000 (to justify the costs of additional administration.) This money is can be made available for personal research expenses (conference attendance, research assistance, etc.)

13. What happens if I am unsuccessful?

Usually, funders will provide useful feedback. It may then be possible to reframe your application and resubmit it to the same funder, or try another one.

14. With whom should I discuss funding options relevant to me and my work, whether in general terms to in relation to a specific project?

The Research Grants Administrator, a post which is currently held by Miss Rosie Šnajdr. Miss Šnajdr can be contacted by telephone (01223 3)30075), email (rs364@cam.ac.uk), and can be found in room G12 of the Law Faculty Building on Wednesday mornings, Thursdays and Fridays.